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Sources of Annoyance in Close Relationships: Sex-Related Differences in Annoyance With Partner Behaviors

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ABSTRACT. The present study is an examination of sex differences in the sources of annoyance that partners in close relationships might experience as a result of each other's behavior. To test hypotheses derived from S. E. Cross and L. Madson's (1997) self-construal theory and from D. M. Buss's (1989) evolutionary psychology-based model, men and women of varying ages and educational levels were asked to rate how annoyed they would be with each of 13 potentially annoying behaviors of their intimate partner. Results were consistent with self-construal theory in that relationship-threatening behaviors were more annoying to women than to men and autonomy threatening behaviors were more annoying to men than to women. Results were also consistent with evolutionary psychology in that aggressive behaviors were more annoying to women than to men and sexual withholding was relatively more annoying to men than to women. Sex differences in annoyance with relationship-threatening, autonomy-threatening, and reproductive strategy behaviors were independent of age and education level, although these factors did affect respondents' annoyance when partners were unemotional, sloppy, or pleased with their own appearance. Results showed that sources of annoyance in intimate relationships should not only be studied from an evolutionary perspective but from the perspectives of social, personality, and developmental psychology as well.

Key words: annoying partner behaviors, evolutionary behavior, intimate partners, self-construal, sex differences

CONFLICT IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS has important effects on mental, physical, and family health, and much research has been directed toward identifying and explaining such effects (Fincham & Beach, 1999). Considerably less effort has been directed toward increasing our understanding of the origins of such conflicts. Our general aim in the present study is to contribute to the latter body of knowledge by focusing on differences between men and women in the sources of annoyance that partners in close relationships might experience as a result of each other's behavior.

Sex differences in sources of annoyance in close relationships have primarily been studied from the perspective of evolutionary psychology. As argued by Buss and Kenrick (1998), evolutionary psychology is especially suited to explain human behaviors that are involved in promoting reproductive success. In line with this maxim, Buss (1989) theorized that intersexual conflicts arise when the male reproductive strategy of inseminating as many women as possible interferes with the female reproductive strategy of withholding actual mating until sufficient resources have been invested or promised by the man. This model predicts that men are particularly annoyed with women's strategy of withholding mating, whereas women are particularly annoyed with men's sexual assertiveness or aggressiveness (Buss, 1989).

In the spirit of Gould and Lewontin's (1979) famous attack on adaptionist evolutionary theorizing, evolutionary psychology has been criticized for generating hypotheses that are difficult to falsify and for providing post hoc explanations for phenomena that are known already. Rather than entering that debate ourselves, we refer to Ellis and Ketelaar (2000) for a defense of present-day evolutionary psychological theorizing from a philosophy of science perspective and to the comments on their paper for some thoughtful critiques of that defense, some of which express concerns related to those of Gould and Lewontin. For the purposes of the present study, we accept the idea that any theory generating empirically testable hypotheses in a particular field should be taken seriously by empirical researchers in that field, preferably by contrasting the theory's predictions to those generated by another theory, which is precisely what we did in this research.

To test his evolution-based predictions empirically, Buss (1989) first identified behaviors of partners that upset, irritated, hurt, or angered men and women by asking a sample of students with an intimate partner and a sample of newlyweds to indicate whether their partners had performed each of 147 potentially annoying behaviors such that they themselves felt irritated, annoyed, angered, or upset. A factor analysis of these data yielded 15 factors, including sexually withholding and sexually aggressive behavior. Buss's prediction that men would be more

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annoyed with women's sexually withholding behavior than vice versa was confirmed in both samples, but the prediction that women would be more annoyed with men's sexual aggressiveness than vice versa received only modest support.

In the same research article, Buss (1989) reported a second study in which he asked a group of men and women how irritating, annoying, or upsetting each of these 147 behaviors would be for the intimate different-sex partners of a hypothetical man and woman performing these behaviors. The results again confirmed predictions in that the respondents expected women's annoyance with male sexual aggressiveness to be more intense than men's annoyance with female sexual aggressiveness. The respondents also expected that men would be more annoyed at the female tendency to withhold sex than women would be if the man withheld sex.

The results of both studies also revealed the limitations of evolutionary psychology in terms of explaining sex differences in sources of annoyance that are less obviously related to reproductive success. Specifically, some differences were found that were not predicted by the model. For example, in the Buss (1989) first study, women were more annoyed with a partner who was condescending, neglectful, inconsiderate, and emotionally constricted than vice versa, whereas men were more annoyed with a partner who was physically self-absorbed and moody. The second study revealed that respondents expected men to consider women's moody behavior as more annoying than vice versa and women to consider men's insulting behavior as more annoying than vice versa.

In line with Buss and Schmitt's (1993) conclusion that evolutionary adaptations are not impervious to environmental, social, and cultural conditions, these results suggest to us that an evolutionary approach to explaining sex differences in sources of annoyance should be complemented with other approaches. One such approach can be derived from Cross and Madson's (1997) proposal that men and women differ in their self-construals. These authors depicted women as seeking to maintain a sense of relatedness and connectedness with close others and men as seeking to maintain a sense of autonomy, uniqueness, and individuality. This characterization is consistent with Rusbult's (1987) conclusion that women have a stronger affiliative and communal orientation than men as well as with a wealth of empirical findings in the field of marital relationship research.

For example, in couples struggling with the "closeness versus separateness dilemma" it is usually the wife who wants more interdependence and intimacy and the husband who wants more independence and privacy (Christensen & Heavy, 1990). Wives have also been found to be more active than their husbands in using strategies to maintain the marital relationship (Ragsdale, 1996) and when problems nevertheless arise, they more often react with loyalty or with attempts to discuss the problems (Rusbult, 1987). When asked to imagine how they would react emotionally to their partner's emotional and sexual infidelity, women not only reported more often than men that they would feel repulsed, but also that they would feel depressed, insecure, helpless, and anxious (Shackelford,

LeBlanc, & Drass, 2000), thus indicating that their partner's infidelity would have a serious impact on their personal existence. Men, in contrast, not only reported homicidal or suicidal reactions more often than women did, but they also more often reported that they would experience positive emotions to their partner's infidelity, possibly because that would give them a reason to get out of a relationship that was unsatisfactory already.

Cross and Madson's (1997) characterization would lead one to expect that women are particularly annoyed by behaviors that directly threaten the relationship, because they signal the partner's negative or indifferent attitude toward them or toward their relationship. Such behaviors can be expected to be particularly annoying to women because they constitute a threat to a woman's construal of herself as being involved in a mutually interdependent relationship. Accordingly, a self-construal based approach not only explains Buss's (1989) finding that women were more annoyed by their partner's aggressive behavior than were men, but also the finding that condescending, neglecting, inconsiderate, and insulting behaviors elicited more annoyance in women than in men.

With respect to men's annoyance, Cross and Madson's (1997) characterization would lead one to expect that men are especially critical of behavior that threatens their autonomy. A prime example is a display of sadness, anger, or jealousy that is meant directly or indirectly to induce feelings of guilt (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). Both Buss (1989) studies provided some support for this suggestion in that moody behavior in women was identified as a source of their partner's annoyance.

On the basis of these ideas, our primary aim in the present study was to extend Buss's (1989) work by testing the hypotheses that we derived from the self-construal approach. Specifically, we will examine whether women are more annoyed than men with their partner's relationship-threatening behavior and whether men are more annoyed than women with their partner's autonomy-threatening behavior. A secondary aim was to again test Buss's (1989) hypotheses that women are particularly annoyed by their partner's aggressive behavior and that men are particularly annoyed by their partner's sexual withholding. We tested these hypotheses by asking our respondents how annoyed they would be in the imaginary case that their partner would perform each of several relationship-threatening behaviors and each of several autonomy-threatening behaviors. Respondents were also asked about their annoyance in response to other potentially annoying partner behaviors.

It should be noted that any hypothesis about a particular behavior eliciting more annoyance in Individual A than in Individual B, does not necessarily imply that A is more annoyed with the behavior in an absolute sense. That is, the hypothesis might also be taken to imply that A's annoyance with that behavior is higher relative to A's annoyance with other behaviors. The behavior should rank higher in what could be referred to as A's "annoyance hierarchy" compared with its ranking in B's "annoyance hierarchy."

Of course, both interpretations of what a hypothesis about differences in annoyance implies empirically are equivalent as long as A and B do not differ in terms of the overall intensity of their annoyance. There are good reasons, however, to expect that men and women do differ in terms of the overall intensity of annoyance. Specifically, based on Cross and Madson's (1997) characterization, it seems plausible that women, in addition to being particularly annoyed with relationship-threatening behaviors, also have a more general reason for getting annoyed with a partner's behavior that is potentially annoying for some reason or another. This is so because any annoying partner behavior, regardless of why that behavior is annoying in the first place, might eventually threaten the relationship with that partner and could therefore become a threat to women's construal as being involved in mutually interdependent relationships. Buss's (1989) second study provided some support for this suggestion in that the women considered several behaviors as more annoying than the men did, whereas men did not report more annoyance for any behavior. Moreover, when men and women were compared on an aggregate consisting of the summed ratings of all potentially annoying behaviors, women indicated significantly more annoyance, thus suggesting that women generally react more negatively than men do to the annoying behaviors of their partner.

When there actually is a general tendency for women to be more annoyed than men with their partner's behavior, such an effect would make it more difficult to test hypotheses about sex differences in respondents' reactions to specific behaviors. This is so because any finding of women being more annoyed with a particular behavior could either reflect the general female tendency to be more annoyed with any annoying partner behavior, or it could reflect a reason for being annoyed by a specific behavior. A tendency for women to be more annoyed in general would also diminish chances to confirm any hypothesis implying that men are more annoyed with particular behaviors. Even if such effects existed, they could easily be masked by women's tendency to be more annoyed in general. In the present study we dealt with this problem by using an analytical strategy that focuses both on the differences between men and women in terms of the absolute intensity of their annoyance with each particular behavior and on the rankings of the respondents' annoyance ratings of each behavior in their own annoyance hierarchies.

One potential problem with studies in this area is that the results can easily be seen as reflecting stereotypical ideas about how men and women behave or about what men dislike in women's behavior and vice versa. To minimize this problem, we did not ask our respondents how their partners actually behaved (as was done in Buss's 1989 first study) nor how annoyed a hypothetical male and female individual would be when their partners would behave in particular ways (as was done in Buss's 1989 second study), but rather how annoyed they themselves would be in the imaginary case that their own partner would perform each of the potentially annoying behaviors. By having respondents imagine that their

partner would behave in a particular way, we attempted to reduce the chances that their answers would reflect stereotypical ideas about typical male and female behavior patterns. By focusing on the respondents' own emotional reactions, we attempted to reduce the chances that their answers would reflect stereotypical ideas about what men and women generally dislike in their partner's behavior.

The self-construal-based approach is similar to the evolution-based approach in that it implies that the proposed differences between men and women are quite general. We expected that the effects of the respondents' gender should therefore be found irrespective of other characteristics of the respondents, such as age and education level. In this study, we recruited the respondents in such a way that they were likely to vary somewhat more in terms of age and education level than was true for previous research (e.g., Buss, 1989), and we subsequently took these variables into account when testing our hypotheses.

Method

Respondents

Participants were recruited from the social acquaintances of 32 Dutch psychology students who received course credit for recruiting the respondents and for obtaining their responses to our questionnaire. No restrictions were posed on the respondents' ages and education levels, but they had to have been involved in a relationship with an intimate partner for at least 1 year.

This recruitment procedure resulted in an initial respondent group of 244 individuals. Unfortunately, the division across age in this group was rather uneven. Most respondents were in their 20s, with a second, and considerably smaller, group being in their late 40s or early 50s. Accordingly, both the 35-to-45-year age range and people above 55 were underrepresented in our sample.

Because we planned to use age as a continuous variable in the data analyses, this uneven division across age was problematic. Therefore, we restricted our analyses to respondents who were 36 years old or younger. This decision resulted in a final respondent group of 99 men and 92 women (mean age = 23, SD = 3.7, age range = 16 to 36). The percentages of respondents with mid-level-vocational education or lower, high-level professional education, and university-level education, were 16%, 30%, and 54%, respectively.

Procedure and Dependent Measures

On the basis of Buss's (1989) 15-factor solution, we developed a questionnaire in which respondents were presented with 13 potentially annoying behaviors or behavioral tendencies, each of which represented one of Buss's factors. We based our choice of Dutch terms representing each factor on the factor labels that Buss used and on the nature of the individual items that loaded on each factor in

Buss's study. For example, the factor that Buss labeled Insulting of Partner's Appearance not only contained the item "He/she insulted my appearance," but also "He/she touched my body without my permission." We decided to ask our respondents about their annoyance with their partner's insulting behavior in general rather than with the specific type of insult that Buss used to characterize this particular factor.

In the instructions, respondents were asked to imagine that their own partner would perform each of these behaviors and to indicate how annoyed they would then be with that behavior of their partner. Respondents gave their answers using a 5-point rating scale ranging from *very much* (5) to *not at all* (1).

Because the student data collectors recruited respondents from their own social acquaintances, we decided not to include questions corresponding to the factors that Buss (1989) labeled as Sexualizes Others and Unfaithful. One problem was that the students would be reluctant to confront their acquaintances with such questions and another was that respondents might not respond truthfully. We did not expect this omission to have important effects for our results, because Buss (1989) did not find sex-related effects for either of these behaviors.

The behaviors that were included in the questionnaire and their correspondence to Buss's (1989) original factors are listed in Table 1. As can be seen in Table 1, 10 of these behaviors were identified as being relevant to one or more of our hypotheses. The three remaining behaviors were neutral in that no predictions were made for them.

The student data collectors distributed the questionnaire. Respondents completed them in private after which the student data collector collected the questionnaires and gave them to their instructor to obtain course credit.

Results

Sex Differences in Overall Annoyance

As a first step we examined whether the male and female students differed in terms of overall annoyance with their partner's potentially annoying behaviors. We conducted an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on an aggregate consisting of the average annoyance ratings of all 13 behaviors as the dependent variable with Respondent Sex as the grouping factor and age and education level as covariates. As expected, the analysis yielded a significant main effect of Respondent Sex, $F(1, 187) = 19.10$, $p < .001$. The mean annoyance ratings of men and women were 3.31 and 3.61, respectively, thus confirming that women were generally more annoyed with partner behaviors than men were. Neither age nor education level was significantly related to overall annoyance.

As pointed out earlier, women's tendency to be generally more annoyed than men implies that behavior-specific hypotheses about sex differences should not

TABLE 1. The 13 Potentially Annoying Behaviors Used in the Questionnaire and Buss's (1989) Corresponding Factor Labels

	Behavior	Buss's factor
	Relationship threatening	
1	Condescending	Condescending
2	Inconsiderate	Inconsiderate
6	Neglecting	Neglecting–Rejecting–Unreliable
8	Insulting	Insulting of Partner's Appearance
11	Aggressive	Sexually Aggressive
12	Self-centered	Self-Centered
13	Abusive	Abusive
	Autonomy threatening	
4	Moody	Moody
5	Jealous	Possessive–Jealous–Dependent
	Reproductive strategy	
7	Sexually withholding	Sexually Withholding–Rejecting
11	Aggressive	Sexually Aggressive
	Other	
3	Pleased with one's appearance	Physically Self-Absorbed
9	Unemotional	Abuses Alcohol–Emotionally Constricted
10	Sloppy	Disheveled

Note. Numbers in the stub column indicate the order in which the behaviors were presented. Aggressive is included twice because it is both relationship threatening and related to reproductive strategies.

only be tested on the basis of the respondents' raw ratings but also on the basis of how their ratings rank in their private annoyance hierarchies. Thus, we computed the annoyance rankings of all 13 behaviors for each respondent. Ties were treated by assigning all behaviors within the tie group (i.e., all behaviors with the same rating) the mean of the rankings that the behaviors in the tie group would have received if they had not been tied. For example, when a respondent assigned the highest annoyance ratings to behaviors x and y, giving the next highest rating to behavior z, behaviors x and y both received the ranking of 12.5, whereas z received the ranking of 11. All analyses reported hereafter were carried out both for the raw and the ranked ratings.

Annoyance With Relationship-Threatening Behavior

To test our hypothesis that women would be more annoyed with their partner's relationship-threatening behavior than would men, we first conducted a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) with the annoyance ratings of aggressive, condescending, inconsiderate, neglecting, insulting, self-centered, and abusive behaviors as the dependent variables, Respondent Sex as the grouping factor, and age and education level as covariates. The analysis on the raw ratings yielded a significant effect of Respondent Sex, $F(7, 181) = 4.49$, $p < .001$; this same effect was significant for the ranked ratings as well, $F(7, 181) = 3.48$, $p < .01$.

Subsequently, eight separate univariate analyses of variance with Respondent Sex as the grouping factor and age and education level as covariates were carried out for each relationship-threatening behavior separately. The main effects of Respondent Sex are given in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Effects of Respondent Sex on the Raw- and Ranked Annoyance Ratings of Relationship-Threatening Behaviors

	Men ($n = 99$)		Women ($n = 92$)		
Behavior	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	$F(1, 187)$
Aggressive					
Raw	3.83	1.18	4.42	.92	14.23***
Rank	8.60	3.22	9.90	2.73	8.46**
Condescending					
Raw	3.90	1.13	4.35	.82	9.21**
Rank	8.93	3.16	9.41	2.66	1.15
Inconsiderate					
Raw	2.58	.97	2.84	.98	3.22
Rank	4.68	2.48	4.30	2.44	1.04
Neglecting					
Raw	3.74	1.03	4.11	.87	6.85**
Rank	8.41	2.59	8.66	2.48	.48
Insulting					
Raw	4.03	1.06	4.35	.78	4.64*
Rank	9.33	2.91	9.51	2.38	.08
Self-centered					
Raw	3.78	1.04	4.15	.94	6.32*
Rank	8.39	2.95	8.97	2.78	3.85
Abusive					
Raw	3.33	1.15	4.05	1.00	20.67***
Rank	7.11	3.19	8.56	2.83	11.02***

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

As can be seen in Table 2, the analyses of both the raw and the ranked ratings of annoyance with aggressive and abusive behaviors yielded significant effects of Respondent Sex that reflected women's tendency to be more annoyed with these behaviors than men were. Because these effects were obtained for both raw ratings and ranked ratings, they confirm the hypothesis that we derived from the self-construal approach, that is, that women are more annoyed with relationship-threatening annoying behaviors than men are. It should be noted, however, that the results for aggression are in line with Buss and Kenrick's (1998) evolutionary approach as well.

Similar patterns of male–female differences were found for annoyance with condescending, neglecting, insulting, and self-centered behaviors, but for these behaviors the analyses on the ranked ratings did not yield significant effects of Respondent Sex. Accordingly, women's relatively high ratings of annoyance with these behaviors might reflect their general tendency to be more annoyed than men are, rather than any behavior-specific reasons for being annoyed.

Unlike our prediction, we obtained no sex differences for annoyance with inconsiderate behavior. As can be seen from Table 2, inconsideration was an exception in another respect too, in that its raw and ranked annoyance ratings were considerably lower than for any other relationship-threatening behavior.

With one exception, annoyance was not significantly related to the respondents' ages or education levels. The exception concerned both the raw and ranked ratings of annoyance with one's partner's insulting behavior, which were significantly related to the respondents' ages, $Fs(1, 187) = 7.09$, $p < .01$, and 4.32, $p < .05$, respectively. Pearson product–moment correlations between age and the raw and ranked ratings of annoyance with insulting behavior were $-.19$, $p < .01$, and $-.15$, $p < .05$, respectively. Accordingly, the older the respondents were, the less they reported annoyance because of their partner's insulting behavior.

Annoyance With Autonomy-Threatening Behavior

To test our hypothesis that men would be more annoyed with their partner's autonomy-threatening behavior than women, we first conducted a MANCOVA with the annoyance ratings of jealous and moody behaviors as the dependent variables, Respondent Sex as the grouping factor, and age and education level as covariates. The analysis on the raw ratings did not yield significant effects including Respondent Sex, but the analysis on the ranked ratings did yield a significant main effect of Respondent Sex, $F(2, 186) = 6.26$, $p < .01$.

Subsequently, separate univariate ANCOVAs, with Respondent Sex as the grouping factor and age and education level as covariates, were carried out for each autonomy-threatening behavior separately. Neither covariate was significantly related to annoyance with any of the autonomy-threatening behaviors. The main effects of Respondent Sex and the corresponding means are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Effects of Respondent Sex on the Raw- and Ranked Annoyance Ratings of Autonomy-Threatening Behaviors

Behavior	Men (n = 99)		Women (n = 92)		
	M	SD	M	SD	$F(1, 187)$
Jealous					
Raw	3.19	1.30	3.22	1.07	.01
Rank	6.69	3.51	5.63	2.98	5.42*
Moody					
Raw	3.36	1.08	3.32	.91	.08
Rank	6.96	3.20	5.76	2.72	7.22**

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

As can be seen in Table 3, only the analyses of the ranked ratings yielded significant effects of Respondent Sex, thus indicating that these behaviors ranked higher in men's annoyance hierarchies than in women's. These results nicely illustrate how an exclusive reliance on the respondents' raw ratings can lead one to overlook men's relatively greater annoyance with some of their partner's behavior, because such differences become masked by women's tendency to be more annoyed with potentially annoying behavior in general. When taken together, the findings support our self-construal-based hypothesis that men are more often annoyed with their partner's autonomy-threatening behavior than are women.

Annoyance With Reproductive Strategy Behaviors

To test the evolutionary psychology-based hypothesis that men would be more annoyed with sexually withholding behavior than would women, we carried out two separate ANCOVAs, with Respondent Sex as the grouping factor, age and education level as covariates, and the raw and ranked annoyance ratings for sexual withholding as the dependent variables. In both analyses, neither covariate was significantly related to annoyance.

As was true for the autonomy-threatening behaviors, Respondent Sex did not significantly affect the raw annoyance ratings of sexual withholding, $F(2, 187) = .61$, $p > .05$, but the effect on the ranked ratings was significant, $F(2, 187) = 4.09$, $p < .05$. The raw and ranked annoyance ratings for men versus women were 3.72 (SD = .97) versus 3.79 (SD = .88) and 8.20 (SD = 3.15) versus 7.34 (SD = 2.74), respectively. Therefore, even though the raw ratings of annoyance with sexual withholding did not differ for men and women, this behavior did rank higher in men's annoyance hierarchy than in women's, which is consistent with Buss's 1989 model.

Annoyance With Other Behaviors

To examine whether men and women would differ in terms of their annoyance with partners being unemotional, pleased with their appearance, or sloppy, we carried out separate univariate ANCOVAs with Respondent Sex as the grouping factor and age and education level as covariates for each of these behaviors. Both the raw and ranked ratings of annoyance with one's partner's unemotional behavior were significantly related to the respondents' education level, *F*s were 6.35, $p < .05$ and 6.31, $p < .05$, respectively. Pearson product–moment correlations between education level and the raw and ranked ratings of annoyance with unemotional behavior were .17 and .15, respectively (both *p*s < .05). Accordingly, respondents were relatively more annoyed with their partner's unemotional behavior when their education level was higher.

We found a significant main effect of Respondent Sex for the raw ratings of annoyance with a partner's unemotional behavior, $F(1, 187) = 3.90$, $p = .05$, but not for the ranked version of these same ratings, $F(1, 187) = .03$, $p > .05$. Accordingly, although women gave higher annoyance ratings than did men, $M = 3.33$ ($SD = 1.04$) versus $M = 3.03$ ($SD = 1.11$), respectively, being unemotional did not rank significantly higher in women's annoyance hierarchies than it did in men's, $M = 5.97$ ($SD = 3.26$) versus $M = 5.93$ ($SD = 3.17$), respectively. Women's relatively high ratings of annoyance with unemotional behavior might rather reflect their general tendency to be more annoyed with their partner's behavior than some behavior-specific reason.

The analyses on the raw and the ranked ratings of annoyance with a partner being pleased with his or her appearance revealed that both the raw and ranked ratings were significantly related to the respondents' education level; *r*s were –.16, $p < .05$, and –.15, $p < .05$, respectively. The higher the respondents' education level was, the less annoyed they were when their partner was pleased with his or her appearance. There were no significant effects of Respondent Sex, *F*s (1, 187) = 3.06, $p > .05$, and .26, $p > .05$, respectively. Mean raw annoyance ratings for men versus women were 2.26 ($SD = 1.12$) versus 2.54 ($SD = 1.06$), respectively. The corresponding mean ranked ratings for men versus women were 3.96 ($SD = 3.03$) versus 3.76 ($SD = 2.70$), respectively.

The analyses on the raw and the ranked ratings of annoyance with one's partner's sloppy behavior again did not yield significant effects of Respondent Sex, *F*s(1, 187) = 1.53, $p > .05$, and 1.17, $p > .05$, respectively. Mean raw annoyance ratings for men versus women were 2.28 ($SD = 1.14$) versus 2.45, ($SD = 1.01$), respectively. The corresponding mean ranked ratings for men versus women were 3.83 ($SD = 2.94$) versus 3.30 ($SD = 2.51$), respectively. The covariates were not significantly related to the raw ratings of annoyance with one's partner's sloppiness, but the respondents' ages were related to the ranked ratings, $F(1, 187) = 11.30$, $p = .001$. The Pearson product–moment correlation between age and ranked annoyance was .26, $p < .001$. Accordingly,

sloppiness ranked higher in the annoyance hierarchies of older than younger respondents.

Discussion

In line with the study's primary aim to test the hypotheses that we derived from the self-construal approach, we first examined whether women would be more annoyed with relationship threatening behavior than men would. This hypothesis received support from our data, in that women gave higher annoyance ratings for six out of seven relationship threatening behaviors; two of these behaviors also ranked significantly higher in women's annoyance hierarchies.

The only exception to this general pattern was annoyance with a partner's inconsiderate behavior. With the wisdom of hindsight, we now think that our translation of this term into the Dutch term "nonchalant," although legitimate, has been unfortunate. Nonchalant does not have the unambiguously negative connotation of inconsiderate; rather, it resembles the English "casual" in that it may be used to refer to a looseness of manners that is not necessarily unpleasant. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the annoyance ratings of inconsiderate/nonchalant ($M = 2.84$) were on the average much lower than those of the other relationship threatening behaviors ($M = 4.24$, with a range of 4.05 to 4.42). Accordingly, the fact that no sex differences were found for inconsiderate should probably not be seen as evidence against the hypothesis.

We then examined our second hypothesis based on the self-construal approach, that men would be more annoyed with autonomy-threatening behavior than women would. As before, the hypothesis received support from the data in that annoyance with one's partner's jealous and moody behavior ranked higher in men's annoyance hierarchies than it did in women's.

The study's second aim was to retest Buss's (1989) hypotheses that women are particularly annoyed by their partner's aggressive behavior and that men are particularly annoyed by their partner's sexual withholding. The data unequivocally confirmed the first hypothesis in that the women's raw and ranked annoyance ratings for aggression were higher than were men's, but it should be noted that this same effect was also predicted on the basis of the self-construal approach. With respect to sexual withholding, the hypothesis also received support in that annoyance with one's partner's sexual withholding ranked higher in men's annoyance hierarchies than it did in women's.

Both the evolutionary approach and the self-construal approach would lead one to expect differences between women and men that are independent of the respondents' ages and education levels. In the present study, we ensured that the reported effects of the respondents' gender actually did not depend on age or education level by including these factors in the analyses as covariates. With one exception, age and education level actually were not related to the respondents' annoyance with relationship-threatening, autonomy-threatening, or reproductive-strategy behavior.

The only exception was that older respondents were relatively less annoyed by their partner's insulting behavior than were younger respondents. This effect and the effects of age and education level that were found for the three annoying behaviors for which no predictions were made on the basis of either the self-construal approach or the evolutionary approach suggest that a complete theoretical account of sources of annoyance in close relationships needs input from other theoretical sources as well.

The present study is not without limitations, one of which concerns the way in which the respondents were recruited. It could be argued that the nonrandom nature of our sample limited the generalizability of the study's results to individuals included in the social networks of late 20th-century Dutch psychology students. However, similar limitations are not only very common in research on sex differences, but in other areas of psychological research as well. Rather than striving to use samples that are randomly selected from large populations in each individual study, we preferred to correct for the sampling errors that are almost unavoidable in individual studies by treating such studies as datapoints that should be included in future more comprehensive analyses.

When taken together, our data support both the evolution-based approach and the self-construal-based approach to explaining sex differences in sources of annoyance. This raises the issue of how these approaches are related to each other. One might simply see them as two competing approaches that are each able to explain a particular part of the variance. However, such a view ignores the possibility of a hierarchical relation between both types of approaches. For example, even when some sex differences in sources of annoyance are best understood as originating from women's striving toward maintaining a sense of relatedness and connectedness and from men's striving towards autonomy, one could still ask questions about the origins of such differences. Answering such questions might well require the kind of evolutionary theorizing that was the basis of the Buss (1989) model.

At the very least we think that our results indicate that the meaning of constructs used to explain intersexual annoyance can be enriched by research at different levels. Even though we are equipped with an evolutionary past, humans have to function as individuals in a social and cultural context that affects how they define themselves as men or women. The issue of the sources of annoyance in close relationships should be addressed not only from an evolutionary perspective, but also from the perspectives of social, personality, and developmental psychology.

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